4-1-1997

Cognitive Metaphor and Literary Theory: Towards the New Philology

Donald C. Freeman

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/dlls
Cognitive Metaphor and Literary Theory:
Towards the New Philology

Donald C. Freeman
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Thanks to a growing body of unanswered criticism, a scandal over "science studies" involving one of the most influential journals of "cultural studies" and "theory," and a stunning recantation by one of its most renowned practitioners, the ascendancy of so-called literary "theory" may be coming to an end. Lest we lapse unwittingly into one of "theory's" laziest intellectual habits, however, we must remember that in any argument for paradigmatic change, mere critique of the status quo, skepticism tout court, is only half the job. "Just say no" is just too easy. For the other half of the job—a start at repairing the damage that "theory" has wrought literary criticism and scholarship—we need to develop and institutionalize a new and serious program for literary study.

After a brief account of the present state of affairs, I will suggest such a program: what I call the New Philology—a term encompassing such fields of study as stylistics, discourse structure, narratology, contemporary metrics, the European poetics descended from the Prague School and Russian Formalism, the new and growing body of research in cognitive metaphor, and enough nonspecialist knowledge of contemporary linguistics to do work in these fields. With the New Philology as a basis, scholars and critics of literature and the language of literature can begin restoring literary study to the standing it once enjoyed as a serious academic discipline.

That import was not a car, a cheese, or a perfume. It was a product of French intellectual jouissance called deconstruction, which became coupled to the distinctly nonjouissant Anglo-American lit-crit machine.

Deconstruction has eluded all efforts at succinct definition, but we might characterize it as an effort to interrogate existing paradigms of knowledge by dissecting the unstated assumptions, implicit metaphors, etc., of the language in which these paradigms are expressed. Deconstruction marked the genesis of the new "interdisciplinarity," a variety of scholarship in which the researcher no longer needs to know much about the "inter" discipline. In the case of this Ur-theory— deconstruction—the "inter" discipline was linguistics. However, by declining to acquire at least the rudiments of modern linguistics, Jacques Derrida and his disciples ignored the vast volume of contemporary linguistic research and theory. Instead, they "recuperated" a programmatic book representing the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who conveniently wrote in French, but inconveniently died in 1913.

Now even if Derrida et al. had gotten right the version of Saussure's work upon which they purport to rely (and there is substantial unrebutted evidence that they got it wrong), I have always found it passing strange that for a philosophical and literary theory based upon language, Derrida turned to a work, Saussure's Course in General Linguistics, that predates by fifty years the theoretical revolution that has created modern
linguistics. This work, moreover, was not written by the scholar whose name is on the title page, but was produced by two of his colleagues and former students relying entirely on their notes and those taken by still other students on Saussure's lectures in his introductory course in general linguistics, which was unsurprisingly entitled "Course in General Linguistics."

It is rather as though we at this conference developed a revolutionary new theory of physics, qualified as we are to theorize about physics, based on the notes of three students in Mathematics 101 as it was taught by Albert Einstein at the Bundesinstitut für Technik in Zürich at about the same time. Most of us have suffered the damage to our self-esteem consequent upon our reading in student exams and term papers their versions of our lecture notes. But even if Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, the two compilers of *Course in General Linguistics* had themselves gotten Saussure's thought right (a matter that is not free from doubt), that book is not the source of Saussure's standing among practicing linguists. Just as Einstein was first a physicist and only secondarily a mathematician, so was Saussure first an Indo-Europeanist, a very good one, and secondarily a general linguist. Saussure's standing in linguistics derives chiefly from his brilliant hypothesis about Indo-European laryngeals, developed in a series of complex, technically detailed scholarly papers that most of you doubtless know better than I do—scholarly papers that are not, shall we say, nightstand reading.

My purpose in this diatribe is not to beat up on Saussure or the compilers of *Course in General Linguistics*—far from it. Rather, I mean to argue that insofar as deconstruction is basic to "theory" and "interdisciplinarity," and I believe that it is both; and insofar as deconstruction as a theory in and of itself is founded upon a conception of language, the House of Theory is like unto a house built upon the sand, with the consequence, as this audience doubtless will recall, that in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 8, verse 27, "the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

Perhaps the theory crowd hasn't yet gotten to the Sermon on the Mount. But the winds, at least, have been blowing for a long time. The scope of interdisciplinary "theory" has broadened from the base of deconstruction into the New Historicism and, most recently, into what has become known as "cultural studies." In "cultural studies," more or less all knowledge has become the province of, not sociology and anthropology professors, but literature professors and their students. We have seen books by English professors on pedophilia and cross-dressing; dissertations by English Ph.D. students on birthing and Los Angeles thrift shops. The Miltonist Stanley Fish has published a book on literary theory and the law—not legal themes in literature, but essays claiming to show how "theory" can deconstruct court decisions, legal principles, and the like. In an earlier essay that became the title piece of his controversial book *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech, and It's a Good Thing, Too,* Fish ventured into Constitutional law, proposing that the United States abandon Constitutional guarantees of free speech that have been elaborated in more than two centuries of jurisprudence and are the envy of an apparently unenlightened world. Instead, Fish would assign authority over what speech shall be permitted to whatever group currently holds political power. All of this work has made bold and explicit claims for being "interdisciplinary" or "multidisciplinary."

Most recently—and fatefuly—"theory" has ventured into what its practitioners call "science studies." Philosophers and some social scientists also are involved in this effort, but I will limit myself to literature professors. The aim of this work is to interrogate—to put in question, to problematize—the scientific method, ideas of empirical evidence, scientific objectivity, scientific "laws," and so forth. The flavor of this work is perhaps best captured in a comment attributed to (and not denied by) an editor of the leading journal of this brand of cultural studies, *Social Text.* Said he, "I won't deny that there is a law of gravity. I would nevertheless argue that there are no laws in nature, there are only laws in society. Laws are things that men and women make, and that they can change."

Imagine yourself to be someone who stands outside this work, who has professional training, perhaps primary professional training, in the discipline that is the "inter-discipline," the discipline that is being joined to "theory." Further imagine, if you will, that you believe that the "interdisciplinary" "theorist" who is writing about your field of expertise knows little or nothing about it. What do you do? You can ignore it. That is what linguists did with deconstruction, for I do not know a single linguist who believes in it. Nor am I aware of any published critiques of the deconstructionist enterprise by academics whose primary field of...
Sokal submitted this farrago to the editors of Social Text, who published it without demur, and, significantly, without seeking the advice of a real scientist, as opposed to a practitioner of "science studies." Sokal's essay appeared in Social Text as a regular article, part of a special issue on the so-called "science wars."

Alas, simultaneously, and without telling the editors of Social Text, Sokal published in the gadfly journal Lingua Franca an essay exposing his "Transgressing the Boundaries" article as a complete hoax. He adopted this strategy, Sokal wrote, to show that "a leading North American journal of cultural studies...[would] publish an article liberally salted with nonsense if (a) it sounded good and (b) it flattered the editors' ideological preconceptions." His Social Text article was, Sokal wrote, a parody of "science studies" that was, in his own words, "a mélange of truths, half-truths, quarter-truths, falsehoods, non-sequiturs, and syntactically correct sentences that have no meaning whatsoever." This tempest burst forth from the academic teapot into a story carried on the front page of the New York Times one Saturday morning. A torrent of defenses, counterattacks, and counter-defenses ensued, culminating (for the moment, at least) in a brilliant essay in the New York Review of Books eviscerating "science studies," written by Steven Weinberg, a physicist who holds the Nobel Prize.

Dismaying, Social Text's editorial standards in the Sokal Affair attracted many staunch and prominent defenders. In an essay on the Op-Ed page of the New York Times, the ubiquitous Fish assailed Sokal's demonstration as an ethical lapse and sought to defend "science studies" by comparing the rules of physics to the rules of baseball. More sweeping defenses could be heard in private academic corridor chat. A common theme was that Sokal's action had "damaged interdisciplinary research." What the Sokal affair has damaged, of course, is bad interdisciplinary research. Equally disturbing has been the rhetorical success of Social Text's defenders in damage control, limiting the scope of Sokal's critique to "science studies" in an effort to obscure the larger issue of slipshod interdisciplinary humanistic research in general. The thread of "interdisciplinary" connects "science studies" to virtually all of the remaining "theoretical" enterprises: the faux linguistics of deconstruction; what I am reliably informed is the faux history of the New Historicism; the faux law of "legal studies," and the faux anthropology and sociology of "cultural studies."
The Sokal Affair has demonstrated with appalling clarity that the "theory" undertaking has been intellectually flawed from the start: circular, self-serving, and belligerently ignorant.

I believe that these events constitute a cautionary narrative. Its moral is: Bad things happen when a bunch of mutually validating smart people think that they are above the rules. For us as academics, I think these rules include at least the following obligations: to make our work and its premises clear to our nonspecialist peers and to the public; to answer serious critiques of our work in serious and nondissmissive ways; to be willing in principle to modify or abandon positions when we cannot answer these critiques; to protect the right of our intellectual adversaries to teach and publish their views, especially when they oppose our own; to pronounce as experts only where we possess expertise; and, most importantly, to police our own disciplines by calling to account the half-baked and the meretricious.

My firm belief that literary study can be saved from its current leadership may be, as Dr. Johnson wrote of second marriages, the triumph of hope over experience. Still, there is room for guarded optimism. Some of the best and most ardent practitioners of "theory" are beginning to question assumptions in which their careers are heavily invested. Frank Lentricchia, the quondam "Dirty Harry" of literary theory, has, without explicitly admitting it, retracted most of his own "theoretical" work. Lentricchia writes:

If the authority of a contemporary literary critic lies in his theory of x, then wherein lies the authority of the theory itself? In disciplines in which he has little experience and less training, the typical literary critic who wields a theory is not himself a sociologist, historian, or economist, as well as a student of literature. A scandal of professional impersonation? No, because the impersonators speak only into the mirror of other impersonators and rarely to those in a position to test their theories for fraudulence. An advanced literature department is the place where you can write a dissertation on Wittgenstein and never have to face an examiner from the philosophy department. An advanced literature department is the place where you may speak endlessly about gender and never have to face the scrutiny of a biologist, because gender is just a social construction, and nature doesn't exist.14

Exactly. Even Fish, a brilliant critic, the best of my generation, who nevertheless must bear a large share of responsibility for the present quandary of literary scholarship, has recently confessed that he "like[s] savouring the physical 'taste' of [literary] language at the same time that [he] work[s] to lay bare its physics."15

The convergence of these developments and the Sokal Affair suggests that the time is now ripe for a regeneration of literary scholarship using analytical methods, some of which are new and many of which have been around for a while but virtually ignored by mainstream literary research.6 This body of work makes it possible to develop what I am pleased to call "real theory": accounts of literary works, oeuvres, genres, periods, etc., that are in principle predictive, explanatory, and falsifiable. Real theory is crucial to what I want to call the New Philology; at the end of this talk I will elaborate what I see as its crucial aspects.

I focus here on one such methodology, cognitive metaphor. Cognitivists argue that metaphor is a primary mode of thinking that is prior to and not restricted to language. On this argument, metaphor is constructed as schematized embodied and enculturated experience—spatial stories, on the latest account—that is projected into abstractions. Consider, for example, the many ways in which we think about the abstraction we call "life." One important way is to think of life as a journey along a path. Cognitivists say that we project or map a skeletalized mental representation, a schema, of the elements and structure of our physical experience of journeys into the abstraction "life." Those elements are a beginning, an end, a route or path for the journey, something that moves (called a "trajector"), and a vector of progress. The structure would include the fact that the path has margins and that the normal progress along the path is forward from beginning to end.17

Evidence for this analysis is found in idioms like "he's reached the end of the road" (meaning "he has died"), notions of our lives "getting side-tracked," that we're "getting on in years," the idea of "career paths" or, more crucially for this audience, "tenure tracks," and so on. But there is literary evidence, too, in abundance: the first line of the Divine Comedy ("Midway in the journey of our life"), Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death," and so on. The claim is that one of the terms in which we think of life is that of a journey.
Or consider the many different abstractions that we conceptualize in terms of our schematized, embodied experience of containers. Containers consist of a bounded periphery with an inside and an outside. We often think of moods and states of affairs as containers: we are "in a bad mood" or "get into [and out of] trouble." There is no a priori reason why we should think of moods or states of affairs in terms of containers. Yet we find ourselves "struggling to get out of bad relationships," we go "into" and "out of" debt, etc. Debts and bad relationships inhibit our ability to act freely. In cognitive terms, they constrain our freedom of movement; we find it difficult to get from the inside to the outside of their containing periphery.

Cognitivists claim that our understanding of these abstractions is not arbitrary, but consistent with the independently motivated idea of metaphorical projection from our schematized, embodied experience of restriction and containment into our frustrated desire to escape what limits our freedom of movement. We map this physical experience into an otherwise unstructured, abstract idea of the emotional state called a mood.¹

I want to demonstrate how these ideas become a program for "real" literary theory by committing a venial sin: reexamining part of an essay I recently published on one of the most analyzed speeches in literature, the "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech in Macbeth:

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, Creeps in this petty pace from day to day, To the last syllable of recorded time; And all our yesterdays have lighted fools The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player, That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more: it is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing.

Macbeth, V.v.19–28.²

By this point in Macbeth the metaphorical projection LIFE IS A JOURNEY, part of the PATH schema, is well established in the play's dramatic language. In Act I, when Duncan anoints Malcolm as his successor, Macbeth remarks:

The Prince of Cumberland!—That is a step On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap, For in my way it lies.

Liv.48–50.

In the depths of his despair in Act IV, the protagonist observes:

[M]y way of life Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf; And that which should accompany old age, As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, I must not look to have. . . .

V.iii.22–26.

Here Shakespeare—typically, I suggest—blends four metaphorical projections, BAD IS DOWN (the opposite of GOOD IS UP, part of the VERTICALITY schema), LIFE IS A YEAR, LIFE IS A PLANT, and LIFE IS A JOURNEY. This last metaphorical projection Shakespeare—again, typically—manages to evoke a second time with one word, "troops," where old age is seen as a kind of triumphal parade with troops of friends passing in review—along a path.

The CONTAINER schema is likewise well established by Act V. Lady Macbeth has remarked of her husband in Act I that he is "too full o' the milk of human kindness / To catch the nearest way" (I.v.14–16). She understands Macbeth's body as a container full of the wrong liquid. She would also change the liquid that fills the container of her own body and seal it:

Come, you Spirits That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood; Stop up th'access and passage to remorse; That no compunctious visitings of Nature Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between Th'effect and it!

I.v.40–47.

Both the PATH and CONTAINER schemas are crucial in the "To-morrow" speech. There, the path along which time once traveled so freely for Macbeth has become contained within a "petty pace." Shakespeare projects the schematized, embodied experience of containers onto the abstraction of depressed frustration. Macbeth is inside the container of his crimes and their consequences, futilely seeking to escape to the outside. These consequences are in the future, and it is that future that constrains Macbeth to the "petty pace" of those "tomorrows." Time and Macbeth march in measured steps along each point, each
day, of the “way to dusty death,” which is as inevitable an end to that path and that journey as the pen of a civil servant recording a legal document, left to right, syllable by syllable, until the end of time.

Two vague measures of time now become pluralized and reified in another iteration of the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor. As they “light fools the way to dusty death,” our yesterdays (the source point in the PATH schema) illuminate a path forward that is now constrained by the clearly visible terminal point of “dusty death.” As the “fools” of humankind inevitably march toward that unmoving terminus, their—and Macbeth’s—path becomes a shrinking container, as the metaphors LIFE IS LIGHT and LIFE IS A JOURNEY become fused, as is represented in Figure 1.

Once we understand this passage as cognitive metaphor enables us to understand it, as the projection from a complex of very simple, ordinary, embodied experiences of JOURNEY, PATH, CONTAINER, and LIGHT, Shakespeare’s sheer genius unfolds. He lays out a precise horizontal spatial tableau of human mortality (the “fools”), life itself (the lamp held by “all our yesterdays”), the trajectory of our lives (“the way”), and our lives’ containment by the inevitable terminal point of “dust death.” This horizontal spatial tableau now—in four words, “Out, out, brief candle!”—is rotated ninety degrees to the vertical, with those entities and relationships intact. The path now has its source point not in the illuminating lamp of “all our yesterdays” but in the flame of the candle. That flame of life—for LIFE IS LIGHT—is the trajector, the moving entity, like the “fools” of I.22. The flame now moves vertically, down the brief path from its present location in the candle’s wick to its extinction at the unmoving terminal point of the candle’s base, just as the “fools” inevitably move horizontally toward the unmoving terminal point of “dusty death.” Life is still a journey, but that journey now is down the candle—and BAD IS DOWN. The candle, like the cone of light thrown by the illuminating lamp of “all our yesterdays,” is a bounded object. When the candle goes out, darkness will fall, and if LIFE IS LIGHT then DEATH IS DARKNESS.
But that is not the end of this story. As candles burn down, they cast flickering shadows. The steps of that shadow are, like the "tomorrows" of the speech's beginning, constrained to the very short distance that an actor can "strut" (itself a short and constrained step) upon a stage, which is a constrained locus, and for a very short time, much less than the one-day minimum implied by "tomorrow" and "our yesterdays."

Finally, Shakespeare's Macbeth invokes the common metaphor life is a story, describing life as a "tale," one of the simplest prose literary forms, prototypically a straightforward narrative line without flashbacks or subplots. But the tale of Macbeth's life is a "tale told by an idiot." and tales told by idiots lack a coherent time scheme—they are journeys without coherent beginnings and ends. Macbeth's mature career is, finally, a narrative that is not a straight line but a meaningly contorted and convoluted path, in which what should have come at the end ("honor, love, obedience, troops of friends" [V.iii.25]) came at the beginning, at a time when we think the natural movement is upward from where we are.

Taken together, the container and path schemas interact in this speech to create a four-dimensional cognitive model of Macbeth's downfall: the path of his career becomes a container that constrains him in height (he can only "creep" and "strut"; he can no longer "o'erleap," as he does earlier in the play), that constrains him in width (the "syllables" of time are recorded—and limited—horizontally; the actor-trajector in life's drama can "strut" over no wider an area than a theatrical stage), that constrains him in depth (the "dusty death" of his end is now clearly lit and visible), and that constrains him in time (Macbeth's "yesterdays" impel him toward a now enumerable and finite set of "tomorrows"). There is a reason why this speech is one of the most quoted and analyzed passages in the literature of the world—and I believe that a cognitive-metaphoric analysis provides a perspicuous account of that reason.

This kind of intense microanalysis is by no means all that cognitive metaphor can tell us about this play. I have come to regard Macbeth as a kind of Gesamtkunstwerk, one of those untranslatable German nominal compounds meaning roughly "total or totalizing work of art." I first encountered that term in reading about the operas of Richard Wagner, which some musicologist (whose name I have long since forgotten) characterized as Gesamtkunstwerke. All of the great variety of elements that make up the prototypical Wagnerian opera fit together: Teutonic myth, symphonic (rather than operatic) orchestral accompaniment, massive choral singing, powerful theatrical staging of a richness and complexity previously associated only with plays. Wagner scored for orchestras and choruses that were twice the customary size employed in operatic productions. He even designed an instrument called the Wagner tuba to get just the right brass sound, the distinctive voice that we hear, for example, in the Siegfried's Funeral section of Die Goetterdaemmerung. Wagner even wrote his own libretti and then composed the music that fit them. He designed and built a special opera house, the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth, that would give maximum effect to his totalizing (often terrifyingly totalizing) operatic vision. In Wagner's greatest operas, everything fits.

I think Macbeth is like that. Everything fits. It is the shortest of Shakespeare's plays; I don't think Macbeth contains one extra word. And I believe that cognitive metaphor as one basis for "real" literary theory can demonstrate this claim more persuasively than any other theory I know. For once we accept that metaphor is not a matter of language but a matter of thought prior to language—that, in Mark Turner's felicitous phrase, metaphor is part of the literary mind—we can see that the interaction of the path and container schemas I have described captures not only the language of the passages I have analyzed, but many other elements of the play. Indeed, even the critical language written about Macbeth over the last two centuries is dominated by path and container metaphors.

For example, by the time the play gets to the "Tomorrow" speech, we have already seen Macbeth's career conventionally metaphorized as a journey along a path. But the beginning of Macbeth's final downfall also invokes the path schema. Birnam Wood travels a path toward its terminal point of Dunsinane. Lady Macbeth sleepwalks—like that "tale told by an idiot," the path of her journey is deranged: it has no coherent beginning or end. Shakespeare portrays Duncan's deathbed as being in a room contained in a castle contained within a wall, strongly foregrounding each of these elements. Macbeth himself remarks at dusk that "light thickens," as though it had been boiled down in the container of the witches' cauldron whose contents are simmered, as they put it, to a "gruel thick and slab." And Macduff as the embodiment of retribution brings the container
and PATH schemas full circle. He finally forces
Macbeth literally to reverse direction on the path
of his life ("Turn, Hell-hound, turn" [V.viii.3]). In
his birth by Cesarean section, Macduff leaves
the container of his mother’s womb "[u]ntimely
ripp’d" (V.viii.16) from the conventional child-
bearing path (metaphorized in English as "the
birth canal") when he begins the journey of his
life. Macbeth is a Gesamtkunstwerk.

Now this analysis doubtless could be im-
proved. But I do not know of any close-grained
study of this speech’s language that connects
as much of that language as does this analysis to
the play’s larger issues and other dramaturgical
elements: its plot, the structure of particular
events, and so on. I believe that these virtues arise
from the theory of language upon which it is
based, which in turn undergirds the program of lit-
erary research and scholarship that I propound
here.

Cognitive metaphor is an important part of
what I propose to call the New Philology. The
New Philology would assert for the present work
that literary criticism of dramatic poetry begins
with a rigorous analysis of its core metaphorical
projections, along the lines of the foregoing
claims for PATH and CONTAINER metaphors as
crucial to a reading of Macbeth, part of which
I have articulated here; in Othello, the KNOWING
IS SEEING metaphorical projection and its progeny;
in King Lear, BALANCE metaphors; and, in
Antony and Cleopatra, metaphors of CONTAINER,
LINKS, and PATH. This methodology most highly
values those analyses that give the deepest and
broadest account of those projections and their
operation in both the play’s language and in its
plot, characterization, stage business, stage prop-
erties, etc.

I call this work the New Philology to make it
clear that I am not advocating a return to the Good
Old Philology that I was driven through: Gothic,
i-mutation in Old Norse, and Hartmann von Aue’s
Middle High German courtly epic, Der Arme Hein-
rich. Memories, memories. That stuff sure was old,
but most of it really wasn’t very good. Rather, I
denominate this work The New Philology in the hope
that this approach to English studies will come to
be seen as the truly interdisciplinary venture in lin-
guistics and literature that it is. At the same time, as
I have suggested, the rubric of the New Philology
would encompass other contemporary interdiscipli-
nary research in the language of literature.

I do wish to acknowledge one link of the New
Philology to the past. There was a time when
advanced students in literature—English litera-
ture, at any rate—studied English language and
literature, and were obliged as a part of their pro-
fessional training to have firsthand acquaintance
with English and Germanic philology and the
then-contemporary analytical tools, knowledge,
and theoretical insights available for their study.
Justifications for that requirement have not weak-
ened; on the contrary, the Chomskian and post-
Chomskian theoretical revolutions in linguistics
and the huge expansion of our knowledge about the
human faculty of language greatly strengthen the
case for requiring that advanced literature
students study English language in its contempo-
rary theoretical paradigms—for its substance, to
be sure, but just as important, for the intellectual
style of modern linguistics. Linguistics has tradi-
tions of frank and spirited debate; of fundamental
discussion of what constitutes a theory and how
a theory can be supported or falsified; of deep re-
spect for facts and for evidence; and, despite the
strongly left-wing political orientation of many
prominent linguists (a commitment demonstrated
not only in words, but in deeds), a traditional reluc-
tance to equate particular scholarly approaches
with personal politics. Contemporary doctoral
students in literature should have a more than
nodding acquaintance with contemporary theories
of language: syntax, phonology, semantics, prag-
matics, discourse.

I believe that the decline to virtually zero of
philology—the broad range of linguistic fact and
theory that was crucial in the training of literature
scholars—has occurred pari passu with the ascen-
dancy of "theory." I am convinced that at least
in the English-speaking world, the professional
training and now the paradigms of research and
publication in literary study have fallen prey
to an intellectual Gresham’s Law: Bad ideas
have largely driven out good. Ideas that can be
parodied so successfully that the parody fools self-
proclaimed experts are bad ideas. Ideas whose
proponents will not answer serious critiques are
bad ideas. Ideas expressed in deliberately and de-
fiantly, even proudly, obscurantist language are
bad ideas. Ideas that have been shown to be
founded on fundamental errors in the disciplines
of which their proponents profess knowledge are
bad ideas. Ideas whose defenders routinely engage
in ad hominem et feminam attacks, guilt by associ-
ation, and self-serving claims of personal and
political virtue are bad ideas. As I remarked to an
audience in Budapest three months ago, scholars in
that part of the world will perhaps have had more
first-hand acquaintance than have my colleagues in this country with the lethal combination of intellectual correctness and political correctness.

But it does not suffice, as I suggested at the outset, to bemoan these developments, even though the Sokal Affair has demonstrated that growing academic and public concern about the decline of the humanities is well founded. We must present a constructive and serious alternative program to the bad ideas of "theory." I believe that the New Philology is such a program, one that can help redirect literary scholarship toward insights that are rigorous, falsifiable, and humanized.

If we would but hear it, the Sokal Affair is a wakeup call. Thanks to twenty and more years of "theory," the serious study of literature has suffered enormous damage, the full consequences of which are only beginning to be realized.23 I believe that the New Philology offers us a promising basis upon which to reconstruct the study of literature as an academic discipline: literary analysis and criticism whose merits do not depend on its author's politics; literary analysis and criticism that is open, explicit, and arguable; literary analysis and criticism that is, in the best sense, real literary theory. I believe that the New Philology is such a program, one that can help redirect literary scholarship toward insights that are rigorous, falsifiable, and humanized.

Notes

5. The only review I have been able to find that is even arguably of any substance adroitly skips over what I believe to be Ellis's central claim: that deconstruction proceeds from a theory of language and that Derrida and his followers have deeply, grievously, perhaps even deliberately, misread the Course in General Linguistics. See Christopher Norris, "Limited Think: How Not to Read Derrida," Diacritics 20.1 (1990): 17-36.

9. Ibid., 62.
13. "Dirty Harry" was the sobriquet of a film character, a highly unorthodox San Francisco police lieutenant, played by the American movie star Clint Eastwood in several films in the 1970s and 1980s. The films immortalized the phrase, "Make my day."

16. As with interdisciplinary research in the humanities, the problem with "theory" hasn't been the idea of theory, but bad practices in the theoretical enterprise—"bad" in the senses I will suggest in the following discussion.
17. The best and clearest account I know of the life is a journey metaphor is to be found in George Lakoff and Mark Turner, More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
23. I take up these claims for Othello and Antony and Cleopatra, as well as more extended versions of the arguments presented here for King Lear and Macbeth.

24. See, for example, the exchange between Donald Morton and a number of interlocutors in *PMLA* 111 (1996): 133–34, 470–72.